Prods Oktor Skjærvø is distinguished not only by his broad range of expert erudition in Iranistics and his service to this field through both prolific publications and pedagogical aids, but also by his collegiality, including private and public openness to opposing views. I am confident that he will welcome my contribution to this celebration even though I will differ with him, as also with other notable Iranists, in the solution of the problem to which this paper is addressed.

An Old Iranian divine epithet Khshathrapati (Xšaθrapati-) “Lord of Power/Rule/Dominion” is attested as ʰšʰτɾʼpʰty in the Aramaic version of the trilingual stela erected at the Letoön of Xanthos, Lycia, by Pixodaros, the last Achaemenid satrap of Caria and Lycia (A. Dupont-Sommer in Metzger et al. 1974 and 1979). The Greek and Lycian versions of the inscription indicate that it is Apollo for which Khshathrapati is intended as equivalent. Since the publication of the inscription four decades ago, the consensus opinion that Khshathrapati is Mithra has had a growing dossier of alleged evidence. The present article is intended to show that the dossier is unconvincing, and to replace Mithra by another candidate for Khshathrapati.

The identification of Khshathrapati with Mithra was primarily motivated by Apollo’s solarity, whereby the suggestion arose that the equivalent Iranian deity with a solar nature was Mithra. However, the sun was divinized in the Iranian cult as Huwar Khshaita (Avestan huuarxšaēta-). Mithra was properly a god of social agreements (including contracts and pacts), whose course of inspection followed the sun across the sky, and in the course of the centuries before the Common Era became a sun-god himself. That this development had occurred for the Mithra worshipped in southwestern Anatolia in the late Achaemenid period cannot be taken for granted (see Gershevitch 1975).

Two other seeming corroborations of the Khshathrapati = Mithra theory were noted with the publication of the stela. The identification of Khshathrapati with Mithra appeared to have an auspicious precedent in R. Dussaud’s view (see Dupont-Sommer 1976) that the ancient Levantine god named ʰš든pʰ, later called Σατράπης at Elis in the Peloponnese, is of Iranian origin, and represents Mithra as “Satrap.” This opinion, as, we shall see, was more recently taken up by A. D. H. Bivar as part of the evidence for Khshathrapati = Mithra. In fact, the attestation of ʰš든pʰ is limited to the greater Phoenician area. His name is now known to consist of the Semitic ʳ𝐩ʰ “healing, the healer” added to Egyptian ˢd “the savior” or “the enchanter,” a form of Horus who repels vermin, who was brought by Semitic workmen to the Levant from Egypt, a provenience confirmed by the Egyptian traits of the earliest statues of the god from Lebanon dating perhaps as early as the 9th to 7th cent. B.C.E. The Hellenized form Σατράπης, attested in the Phoenician territory (whence the form in Elis), is but a popular etymology for ʰš든pʰ. See Schwartz 2006, 146, and 147, notes 8–15, with references to E. Lipiński. This Phoenician divinity is thus irrelevant for both Mithra and Khshathrapati (=< xšāθra-pati-, in which the element *-pati- “lord” differs from the -pā- “protector” of *xšāθrapā- “satrap”).

A more important apparent corroboration for Khshathrapati = Mithra was M. Mayrhofer’s observation (apud Dupont-Sommer 1976, 653) of a formula, in several Brāhmanaś, which declares that

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Mitra is kṣatrāpati- “Lord of Power.” This implies that *xšaθrapati- and kṣatrāpati- represent parallel inherances from a Proto-Indo-Iranian epithet *kṣatrāpati- for *Mitra. However, no comparable Avestan epithet is found for Mithra. One only finds a structurally different genitive phrase instead of the compound, and this is for Mazda Ahura and not Mithra, in the Gathic Yasna 44.9 paitiša... xšaθrahiiā “Lord of Dominion/Power.” The compound kṣatrāpati- is not found in the Rigveda, which however commonly associates Varuṇa, and thence Mitrāvaruṇa, with kṣatrā, and this may lie behind the Brāhmaṇas’ qualifying Mitra as kṣatrāpati-. Possibly the Gathic paitiša... xšaθrahiiā is inherited from a pre-Zarathushtrian Ahura who resembled Varuṇa; such an Ahura is evidenced in the Old Avestan Yasna Haptaŋhāti, in which Mazdā Ahura’s aqueous wives, the Ahūrānīs, parallel Varuṇa’s Varuṇānīs, and in the Gathas themselves, “not to be deceived is the all-binding (vispā.hišas) Ahura,” as Yasna 45.4e is correctly translated.

The lack of Iranian evidence for Mithra being xšaθrapati- was impressively addressed by P. O. Skjærvø (in Humbač and Skjaervø 1983, 99–100), who derived the name of the Manichean divinity (*xš)u)*(y)spt etc. from *xšaθrapati-, comparing as semantically equivalent Man. Middle Persian dahybed “Lord of the Land/Country” (also attested as a Sasanian title of a ruler), one of the “Sons of Mihr-yazd (=‘the god Mithra’”).

Sims-Williams (apud Boyce 1990, 7 n. 7) showed that the Sogdian must represent (a)Xšes-pat, and attempted to explain the first element as *xšaθbra- via contamination of xšaθra- “land, dominion” by *ṣaθra- (Avestan sōθra-) “dwelling” or via the root-form xšai- “to rule.” Sims-Williams’ evidence for *xšaθbra- is unsustainable. R. Schmitt’s explanation of the Elamite divine name Šetrabattīš (rejecting as impossible etymology from *xšaθrapati-) from a straightforward šaθrapati- “Lord of the Dwelling/Settlement” (pace Sims-Williams, where Schmitt is cited) is corroborated by a Young Avestan divine appellation sōθrhahe paiti- (Yasna 2.16), whereas *xšaθrapati- still requires support. Sims-Williams’ other arguments for *xšaθbra- are unconvincing. The form of Greek ἐξατράπας etc. (vs. σατράπης < *xšaθrapa- “save/ trap”) could be influenced by ἐξατρικόν “to command,” cf. Late Latin admiralis < Arabic ‘amīr (? al-) via admirabilis or the like. Man. Parth. ṭrdxšyhr, Persian ṭrdšyr, derive from *Artaxa-

8th(ī)ya, indicated as ṭṛhšṭry on Frataraka coin-age, cf. Book Pahlavi p’tḥšyl etc. vis-à-vis Inscriptional Pahl. p’tḥštr “treaty” < *pātxšaθriya-. Tumshuq Saka xšer-, Khotoanse kṣira- “country, land, kingdom” could formally derive from *ṣaθra- with semantic influence of xšaθra-.

However, the thesis of an etymological parallelism between Sogd. (a)Xšes-pat and MPers. dahybed fails for reasons of Manichean Middle Iranian realia. It is only in the Middle Persian that Mani’s original Aramaic conception of Living Spirit and his five emanations was “translated” (in Mani’s presentation of his ideas to the Zoroastrian king Shapur I) as the god Mithra and his five sons, the first four of whom are named from the Zoroastrian Pahlavi series mānbed, wisbed, zandbed, and dahybed, which render a series of four “lords” (Av. -paiti-) over a fourfold hierarchy (house, clan, tribe, land/country) associated with Mithra in his Avestan hymn, to which series pahr(ag)bēd “border lord” was added. It must be noted that neither the Living Spirit nor the Splenditenens is ever connected with Mithra in Man. Sogd. texts; Mithra, Man. Sogd. mšyšy ūγy, is merely the Sun.

In Sogdian Manicheism, the equivalents of Mani’s mytholegoumena are rendered quite differently from the Middle Persian, and in general translate or approximate Mani’s original conceptions. Thus the Living Spirit is not named from Mithra (unlike the MPers., where Mihr-yazd = the Living Spirit) but is directly translated Žuwandē GṛiAv “Living Spirit” [- Wād Žiwandē/ Žiwandag < Parthian “id.”] or is approximated as Wēšparkar, the local name of the Old Iranian atmospheric god (Av. Vaiiuš Uparo.kairiio). Similarly the Sogdian names of the emanations of the Living Spirit. Mani’s Adamas of the Light, who has a martial role, becomes Sogd. Šayn, the old god of victory in warfare. Mani’s King of Honor becomes Smān Xšēš/Xšē “Heaven King,” while the Glorious King, who stands on the lowest earth, is named Žay Spandārmet “the Earth (goddess) Spandārmet.”

In this light, the Atlas’ problematic Sogdian name, pōfr’fyy, which appears to mean “the god who causes rushing,” could be explained by a conception of Atlas (in Man. Gr. Ωμοφόρος “Bearing [the earth] on the shoulders,” Syr. Sabbālā “the bearer”) as making the earth[s] whirl on his shoulders. Such a view may have arisen from the flat round shape of the earth borne aloft.
being associated with the firmament, Sogd. ṭbartē (Psalm 19.1 ṭbartē = Syr. ṭbartē), the cognate of Av. ṭbartē- (< *ṭbartā-) “rushing” and “firmament” (Schwartz 1974, 260) the latter word glossed in Persian as xāb-čār “well-wheeled,” cf. Pers. čār-i falak “the (whirling) wheel of the firmament,” sometimes expressed by čār alone. The association of the bearer of the earth with a twirler of firmaments may have been maximized by the Manichean myth’s placement of the wheels of fire, water, and wind close to the Atlas. Quite possibly the concept of the Atlas was approximated by an old local Sogdian divine cosmological wheel-turner; cf. Henning 1937, 59–60 n. 506, who connects poftīyyyy with “speeding” and suggests that a local Sogdian god is behind the identification.

Now, Sogd. (a)Xšēs-pat [whose appellation must be independent of that of its MPers. mythic equivalent, the Lord of the Country] names that emanation which Mani, in his original Araamaic, called the “Holder/Possessor of Splendor,” which is found in the Syriac tradition (in Ephraem Syrus’ Prose Refutations) and independently in Theodore bar Qoni, in Greek (Φεγγόκτονος), and in Latin (Augustine’s Splendideneses).2

Accordingly, with -pat “lord, possessor,” *(a)Xšēs should mean “splendor.” From Proto-Iranian *xšāta- “splendid, bright,” attested in Av. xšāta- “id.” (e.g. in huvara:xšāta- “the Sun” as bright; Ossetic Digorun xšēd “dawn-ruddy”; and Pers. šēd “brightness”), we may posit Old Sogdian *xšāitya- [with regular *-dy- from derivational *-t-ya- still operative after cessation of Sievers’ Law] for *-dy- to Sogd. -s-, see Henning 1937, 63 n. 523.3

A. D. H. Bivar [1988 passim; 1998, 12–30] has built on the Khshathrapati = Mithra theory, taking up again the old Iranizing explanation of the name of the Phoenician god šdṛp/Σατράπης [dismissed above], and making use of Skjærvø’s etymology of *(a)Xšēs-pat in putting forth a novel Iranizing explanation of the Hellenistic god Sarapis [Serapis] which has eluded Iranistic criticism and which I must address here.

Bivar moves from the Xanthos Xšātrapatī-, allegedly Mithra, to Skjærvø’s derivation of *(a)Xšēs-pat from *Xšātrapatī. However, he ignores Skjærvø’s correct equation of *(a)Xšēs-pat with Dahybed (= the Splendideneses). Citing the series of ratu-s [chief representations] in the Pahlavi translation of Yasna 19.9, which had been aduced by Sundermann as the source of Mani’s rendering of the five emanations of the Living Spirit as the Five Sons of Mithra, “Mānbed [‘Lord of the House’], Wisbed [‘Lord of the Clan’], Zandbed [‘Lord of the Tribe’], and Zandūst [‘Zarathushtra’] is the Fifth,” Bivar focuses on the last item. He expects that “Zoroaster” is a Zoroastrian replacement for an original Ṣahṛbed < *Xšātrapatī- “Lord of the Kingdom/Empire” in a series from Median Mithraism in which Xšātrapatī-, as designation of an imperial Mithra, was sacrilege for Zarathushtra as well as for Mani, who changed Ṣahṛbed to Pāhr(ag)bed to name the highest ranking son.4 The latter son, it must be noted, is the King of Honor, and not the Holder of Splendor. Moreover, it is clear that the Avestan hierarchy is a fourfold canon, nmāna- “house,” vis- “clan,” zanitu- “tribe,” and daištu- “land”; the West Iranian imperial use of xšātra- is a later development, and it is absurd to posit a Median ideology which is older than that of the Avesta. More relevantly yet, Bivar invents a word, sahrbed, and treats it as a real entity, although it is attested in no form in Middle Persian. It is the fictive Ṣahṛbed (< Xšātrapatī-), allegedly Mithra as god of the [Median] state, which Bivar then posits as the origin of the Hellenistic god Sarapis, hitherto regarded as Egyptian.

Unfortunately, Bivar’s theory was given respectability by N. Sims-Williams (apud Boyce 1990, 7), whereby Boyce (op. cit.) was inclined to regard the theory as credible. Sims-Williams bypasses the fictive Sasanian MPers. Ṣahṛbed, obviously anachronistic in phonology as a source of the early Hellenistic Sarapis, and opines instead that Sarapis from Xšātrapatī- is possible via an early sporadic *-ṣhr- < *-dr-, citing forms like Elam. Įrdakšara, Gr. Ἀρταξάρης, Babylonian Ar-taḫ-ša-rī from Artaxšātra-. Such evidence is inconclusive, since neither the cuneiform languages nor early Greek had a sound θ (dental fricative), so that *θ- could have been approximated as *hr [Greek Ἀρταξάρης may have entailed dental dissimilation as well]. It is notable that the alleged substandardism does not occur in texts in Aramaic (which could indicate θ). And why should a substandard form be used for the god’s cultic name abroad?

The fact is that there is no reason whatsoever, ideological or iconographic, to derive Sarapis from Iran, let alone from Mithra. In greater Iran it is only among the Bactrians that the cult of
Sarapis flourished, and here ΣΑΡΑΠΟΣ (with s- and not š-) is clearly from the Greek. The magisterial study of Stambaugh 1972 (ignored by Bivar) should leave no doubt of the Egyptian provenience of Sarapis. From linguistic and textual considerations it is clear that this divine name is from Greek (< Late Egyptian compound of “Osiris” + “Apis”) ΩΣΕΡΑΠΙΣ (also ΩΣΟΡΑΠΙΣ), metanalysed as Ω ΣΕΡΑΠΙΣ, Ω ΣΟΡΑΠΙΣ, further supported by papyrological evidence from the middle of the 4th century B.C.E. (see Stambaugh 1972, 5 and 11) and by iconographic evidence and Classical testimonia [Stambaugh 1972, 6, 44, 52, 61 and passim]. It may be added that the oblique form Σαραπιδ, whose final dental was compared by Bivar with that of his fictive sahrbed < *Χαρθαπάτη-, is based on Ασιδ-, cf. Ἀσίδ-, Ὀσιδ-, etc.

Thus the entire series of divine names similar to Χαρθαπάτη —Phoenician śdr?p/Σαράπας, Man. Sogd. (a)Χας-π, and Greco-Egyptian Σάραπις—is merely due to coincidence. One may compare [among many such banal random similarities among names of gods as Akkad. Assā: Vedic Āsura-]; the Phoenician Melqart: Corinthian Μελικέρτης; and West Semitic Dagan, Dagon: Southern Nuristani Dagon, Dagan. 5

It has been seen that no Iranian data support the thesis that at Xanthos Mithra lies behind the isolated occurrence of Khshathrapati. Nothing, moreover, accounts for the putative substitution there of the name Khshathrapati for Mithra [a god who, as his hymn [Yt. 10.56] stresses, must be addressed by his proper name].

The new solution for the identification of Khshathrapati on the Xanthos stela will emerge more clearly after a new consideration of the Greek and Aramaic aspects of the inscription. Rather than mention Apollo [and Artemis] explicitly, the Greek text speaks of “Leto and her progeny,” which reflects the centrality of Leto, into whose sanctuary Pixodaros, as per the inscription, imported the cult of a god of Kaunos from Caria. Leto was of particular importance at Xanthos as patroness of the Lycian Confederation. Her cult at Lycia was distinguished by her presiding over graves [Burkert 1985, 172]. To this chthonic profile of the goddess may be added that the Greek inscription mentions, after Leto and her progeny, the Nymphs, who represented a local volatile spring which (during Alexander’s lifetime, according to Plutarch) spontaneously “upheaved from its depths” (and cast forth a tablet inscribed in ancient letters! See citation in Boyce 1990, 9 n. 38). Leto’s daughter Artemis [for whom no Iranian equivalence was at hand] was associated with the realm of death as mistress of cruel and bloody sacrifices, and like Apollo [see below] as shooter of arrows [Burkert 1985, 152].

Now to Apollo himself. The Aram. juxtaposition ʾrtmws ʾḥṣrtptś provides the names of the sibling pair called in Greek “the progeny of Leto,” and we may now see ʾḥṣrtptś (= Apollo), and not *ʾḥṣrtptś = xšâdrpatiš [nominative], as reflecting a grammatical linkage in the Old Iranian phrasing which lies behind the Aramaic: xšâdrpatiš, instrumental case, “(together) with Khshathrapati.” Humbach [1981, 33] took ʾḥṣrtptś as a frozen vocative.

The larger context, in which Khshathrapati is mentioned alongside Artemis in series with the Abyss, Leto, and the Nymphs—all chthonic—would point to a chthonic aspect of Apollo which is reflected in his translation as Khshathrapati. Now, Apollo in western Anatolia had chthonic associations due to his presiding over healing via incubation in artificial grottoes called Charoneia (or Plutoneia). The most famous Charon-eion, admirably described by Strabo three centuries after Pixodaros erected his inscription, was at Characa, in the Carian homeland of Pixodaros.

Apollo became a sun-god only gradually, originally being an underworld god. The foregoing local circumstances would have tended to prolong Apollo’s older chthonic nature, his being understood as a sun-god in the Greek world gradually taking place from the 5th century onwards [Burkert 1985, 149].

Apollo’s sojourns in the underworld, his close relation to obscurity and death, and his shooting arrows of disease, as well as his healing, are features which make him parallel to the Mesopotamian underworld god Nergal. Furthermore, both Apollo and Nergal are represented by ravens, and are associated with palm trees, snakes, and lions. Both Apollo and Nergal, in aspects of their myths, represent the sun in the netherworld. See Burkert 1985, 149 and 405 n. 22; Kingsley 1999, 82–84, 88–92, 134, 242–43; Bivar 1975, 289.

Now, Nergal’s name goes back to a Sumerian phrase “Lord of the Great City” [Wiggermann 2001, 218–19], which refers to a durable Mesopotamian conception of the realm of the dead as a large urban settlement. This points to the con-
exception of Nergal, as lord of such a realm, being
calqued in Iranian as *Xšaθrapati- “Lord of the
City” [xšaθra- > “city” in West Iranian].

The necessary evidence for an Iranian nether-
world god *Xšaθrapati- comes from Armenian
materials conveniently brought together in Rus-
sell 1987, 330–32. In a digression to Arm. šahap
“satrap,” Russell mentions the Xanthos Khshathrapati
and gives [apparently independently of Bivar, and
without equation with Mithra], a se-
ries of names which we have seen to be irrele-
vant: Σατράπης (and by implication šdṛp); Man.
Sogd. xšyšpt [byw], and Yārapaqs, adding a suggestion
for a Middle Persian etymology of a Coptic
“Sasabed,” the latter based on a misprint in early
editions of J. R. Robinson’s translation of the
Nag Hammadi library; correctly Sasabek]. What
concerns us is Russell’s data on šahapet, a super-
natural being or category of such beings. The ci-
tations from the 13th cent. Oskiberan, in which
various pagan divinities are detailed as šahapet-s
of trees and vines, attest a connection with
vegetation consonant with an ancient chthonic
god. The much older citations from the Classi-
cal Armenian Agathangelos and Eznik indicate
that šahapet is associated with tombs and the
netherworld, as well as with aquatic and terres-
trial reptiles, in particular with serpents, whose
forms the šahapet can assume, leading men to
abandon God for worship of snakes. The latter
details, which imply the worship of a šahapet
intimately connected with snakes, recalls the
iconography of Nergal in the Parthian period at
Hatra, with snakes all around the god and being
part of his accoutrements. 6 We have here evi-
dence of Nergal = šahapet, which must derive
linguistically from *xšaθrapati-, like šahap <
*xšaθrapa- “satrap,” hazārapet < *hazārapati-
“chiliarch,” etc. This confirms that Khshathrapa-
pti “Lord of the [underworld] City/Realm” [a
descriptive epithet with the tabuistic advantage
of serving to avoid naming the sinister god] was
modeled after Nergal.

Such a divinity on ancient West Iranian soil
probably lies behind the vague designation of
“the god under the earth” to whom Xerxes and
Amestris brought human sacrifices, according to
Herodotus VII.114. This god, patently non-Zoro-
avstrian, would have been brought to Persia by
the Magians as part of their old religion. Thus
Khshathrapati would have come to Persia from
the Magian homeland, Media, and specifically
Media Atropatene. This provenience would suit
the northern Mesopotamian history of the Nerg-
gal cult, and the origin of the Armenian Šahapet.

Linguistically, too, *xšaθrapati- conforms to
Median rather than Old Persian phonology; cf.
the Median PN *Xšaθrita- (Darius, Behistun)
vs. OPers. xšaθa- “empire,” and Arm. šahap <
*xšaθrapa- “satrap” vs. OPers. xšaθapat- “id.”
Specifically Median phonology in fact charac-
terizes *hwṛnyš = Axurāνiš “the Nymphs,”
attested in Old Avestan as Ahurâniš (for the
reading *hwṛnyš, see Humbach 1981). The non-
Persic xu < hu is shown to be Median by the
name rendered as Greek Κυάζάρης “Cyaxares” =
*Xuwxâstra- < *Huwxâstra-.

The presence of the Median god Khshathrapati
at Xanthos could be due to the foundation, under
Cyrus’ dispensation, of the city of Xanthos by
Harpagos the Mede and his retinues, including
troops and their families, inevitably with a repre-
sentation of the Median priesthood, i.e. Magi.
Later on, the continuation of Magian religious
practices would have been tolerated by Darius
(as at Persepolis itself), and even under the later
Achaemenid, with their syncretistic Zoroas-
trianism, there is no reason to think that old local
traditions on the periphery of the empire would
have been opposed, especially in a matter such as
an Iranian rendering for a Greek god in the
context, moreover, of an intrusive satrapal Car-
ian religiosity.

It is due to these circumstances that there is
recoverable at Xanthos a unique trace of the old
Median pantheon: Khshathrapati, the Nergal of
Western Iran.

Notes

1. Boyce 1990, 8 n. 10, wrongly has “Keeper of
Splendour” instead of the Living Spirit.

2. For the Syriac evidence of “Possessor of Splen-
dor” in Ephraem and, later, Theodore, see Jackson
1932, resp. 303 and 296–97 with fnn.; the intervening
material in Jackson is informative for my discussion
of the five emanations of the Living Spirit.

3. Sogd. pshšpr, pššpr “provision[s]” is better ex-
plained from *pahyābath- “that which one brings on
the way”; cf. Henning apud Driver 1965, 61.

4. Further material on the Manichean realia may be
seen in the well-indexed Sundermann 2001.

5. It is Dagan on a coin of Mazaeus’ satrapy. The
cereal god holds an ear of grain, and is identified as bīl
dn “the lord Dagan,” not b’l trz. The coin is from Syria, not Tarsus (Lemaire 1991, 45, 47–51). The coin has nothing to do with Mithra or Nergal, contra Bivar 1998, 33, and Boyce 1990, 4.

6. For the iconography of Nergal with serpents at Hatra, see Drijvers 1978, 174–75, where remarks relevant to the discussion of Nergal in the present article are also to be found; Drijver’s paper also cogently dismisses Bivar’s identification of Mithra with Nergal.

Bibliography


